



# Johnson's Garden Talk

Lawn and garden information for the friends and customers of Johnson's Garden Centers

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## Garden Tips

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### Winter Activities

As an avid gardener looking for activities to keep myself busy during the long, cold winter, I have come up with a list of things to do inside this winter. The first thing that I did was to install a high quality plant light. Plant lights of old consisted of an inexpensive incandescent light fixture. This plastic fixture worked pretty well for growing a single houseplant, but did not give off enough light to go beyond a single plant. The product that I am now using is the compact fluorescent GREEN THUMB Light System from HydroFarm. By using a compact fluorescent fixture, I am able to have a full spectrum of light for my houseplants. This system works great for seed starting later this winter, as well as growing flowering plants such as African violets, or my spring-flowering combo pots. These fixtures produce no heat which means more light energy for my plants. The full spectrum light bulb will last for 10,000 hours and comes with a one-year warranty. This bulb is 125 watts which uses about as much energy as a single table lamp.

### Spring-Flowering Combo Pots

Earlier I mentioned spring-flowering combo pots. Last fall we potted up combination pots to bloom this winter. We have kept these pots in our cooler at the proper temperature to develop a strong root system, but most importantly to give the bulbs the proper cold treatment. We worked with Piet Stuijbergen, our Dutch bulb supplier in selecting the right bulbs that will give you several weeks of color this winter. Enjoy crocus, daffodils and tulips this winter inside your home. By picking up several pots and staggering the dates that you put them into a warm spot, you can extend the blooming time for several weeks. We also have available pots containing only tulips, daffodils or hyacinths if you do not want the mixed pots. Be sure to keep the plants evenly watered, usually a couple times per week is plenty.

### Starting Seeds Indoors

Another product from HydroFarms that really helps your winter gardening activities is the Seedling Heat Mat. This product will fit under one plant tray to provide a warm root zone for quick seedling germination and plant development and also helps mature plants grow better. This 10" by 20" mat will warm the soil 10–20° over the air temperature. This is a technique that professional growers have used for years to aid the young plants in getting established. I remember my father telling about having to haul horse manure into the greenhouse for a heat source for the seedlings. We have come quite a ways from those days.

### ***Seed Starting Supplies***

Be sure to stop by this winter and check out the seed starting supplies we have available. Not only do we have the above mentioned HydroFarm products, but we also have a good supply of Jiffy products which include seedling starting media (potting soil formulated for starting seeds), Jiffy 7s, peat pots, plastic trays and pots. We also carry seed racks that have a great selection of herb, vegetable and flower seed varieties to grow in our Midwest climate. A good rule of thumb is to start the seedlings about 6-8 weeks before you want to plant them outdoors. If you can give the new plants protection from the frost, you can start some of your first seedlings in mid January.

### ***Early Crabgrass Prevention***

I know that it's early winter, but if you get an opportunity to apply your ferti•lome All-Seasons Crabgrass Preventer, you'll be ahead of the game. The active ingredient is Barricade, which will not activate until spring. You'll need to water the product in very well, so make sure that the ground is not frozen, pull out the hose and sprinkler and start your early spring lawn care this winter.

### ***Looking Back ...***

I hope all of you had a wonderful Christmas season. It truly is a great time of the year. Most of us get a chance to finally catch a break from our busy schedules once Christmas finally arrives. Many of us were fortunate to be able to spend time with great friends and family members. I hope that everyone was able to reflect over the past year, give thanks for the things provided, and to celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, the real reason for the Christmas season. ■